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*cc Sect.
Mr. O'Connell*

An Runaiocht Angla-Eireannach
Beal Feirsde

20 December 1985

Mr. Eamonn O Tuathail
Anglo Irish Division

Dear Eamonn

I took the opportunity on the call of Bishop Daly yesterday to discuss with him the question of Divis Flats which he had raised with the Minister and which the Minister raised in the context of the Anglo-Irish Conference.

Bishop Daly has recently been in contact with the Minister responsible, Mr. Needham, and with the Chairman of the Housing Executive, Norman Ferguson. He gave me in confidence copies of their recent responses to him. He added that he believes he would have had a much more positive response from the previous Minister, Mr. Patten, than he has had from Mr. Needham. There are about 300 families housed in what remains of the Divis Flats. As you know some of the blocks have already been demolished. The site area is 11½ acres and Needham's letter would indicate that if some flats were included in the rebuilding around 220 families could be housed on the 11½ acres site in the event of the blocks being demolished. If the residents insisted on houses only about 165 families could be housed on the site.

Bishop Daly has at his disposal two blocks of land which he is prepared to have used for housing purposes. What he has in mind is that the land would be made available to housing associations and the associations, on which some local clergy could have a say, would be responsible for the erection of houses. He says similar schemes have been very successful in Northern Ireland in the past and have been very well assisted by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. They have the advantage, if properly established, and they would be in this instance, of denying control over housing to groups such as Provisional Sinn Fein.

One block of land is located at Shaws Road, which is a good way from the Divis complex and is about 10 acres in size. It could in theory accommodate something between 150 and 180 families depending on the type of housing mix. However, it does have the disadvantage of being some way from the centre of town and might therefore not prove attractive to some of the tenants in Divis.. He has a further plot of land available, and the authorities here are not aware of this as yet, in the neighbouring parish between Milltown Cemetary and the Lower Falls and close to the Motorway. He will let me know the extent of this.

.../...

He has a third plot of land which reverted to the Catholic ^{Chapel} ~~Parish~~ as a result of the evacuation of McRory Barracks by the British Army some months ago. However, this is a complicated site as it involves playing fields for schools and the Bishop would not wish to use it unless he is satisfied that alternative playing fields can be made available. As you know there is a great shortage of such space in Catholic Belfast. Bishop Daly is presently taking the advice of architects with regard to this site.

Though a layman in these matters it would seem to me feasible that the residents of Divis could be adequately rehoused if the three sites - that occupied by the Divis complex and the two sites mentioned by Bishop Daly other than McRory - were used to rehouse them. What is required is a determination on the part of Government to make resources available and to pursue the issue. The Housing Executive need also play its part. Divis is a haven for the Republican Paramilitaries. Its destruction and the rehousing of its inhabitants in decent housing would both reduce support for the Paramilitaries and provide a better future for the people who live there.

Yours sincerely

Daithi O Ceallaigh

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